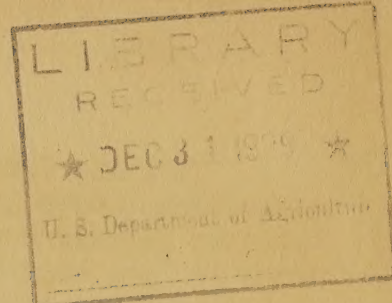


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MEMORIAL TO DR. A. C. TRUE*

E. W. Allen

It is said that some men never live in the large sense, because they are never truly born. Some do not die because the fullness of their birth and the richness of their lives perpetuate their place in the world.

Alfred Charles True was born into a life of virile activity, and he lived in an unusually productive sense. The work he accomplished and his influence will persist because they are so thoroughly woven into the system he had such a large part in developing.

With a single exception, this is the first year he has been absent from the convention of this body since 1892. For thirty-eight years he was a participant in its meetings, and he occupied a unique position in it and in the minds and hearts of all classes of its membership. He was diligent in its service and a large share of his work centered here or looked to this body for acceptance. The facts of his life have been presented elsewhere. It remains to pay homage to his memory, and to trace the background and the meaning of some of the things he did.

It is difficult to realize that when Dr. True entered the employ of the Federal Department of Agriculture in 1889, the new era of the land-grant colleges was only just dawning. The Morrill Act of 1890 was still in abeyance, and the colleges were groping in uncertainty as to what to teach and how to teach it, with little in common as to standards and objectives. Agricultural instruction of secondary grade was practically nonexistent, and such terms as rural economics and sociology, agricultural engineering, and home economics were unfamiliar. The Hatch Act was just coming into operation, and the experiment stations were essentially isolated outposts, largely occupied with the needs of the hour. Contacts with farming people were being developed here and there through farmers' institutes and similar agencies, but the systematic cooperation of the Nation and the States in an extension service had not even been conceived of.

Into this situation came a young man of thirty-five years, schooled in the classics and with fifteen years' experience as teacher. Unknown and inexperienced in the field of agricultural education or research, the insight and the constructive judgment he rapidly developed were the more remarkable. Reared in an atmosphere of learning and at heart a scholar, he promptly adapted himself to his new field. Almost his first assignment was the preparation of a monograph on the history of agricultural education and research in the United States, which task served to familiarize him with the status of the movement and gave him a national viewpoint.

*Presented at the annual convention of the Association of Land-Grant Colleges and Universities at Chicago, November 12, 1929.

With his firm belief in group contacts as an effective means of developing ideas and policies, it was inevitable that Dr. True should enter into intimate relations with the Association of Land-Grant Colleges. From what seems to have been his first appearance before this body, in 1892, he was continuously on its program and active in its committee work up to the close of his life. For seventeen years he edited the proceedings, personally or with assistance, up to 1910. He was chosen bibliographer in 1895, and year after year presented his series of reports with their wealth of digested material. In 1913 he was honored by election to the presidency of the association, and in his address the following year dealt in a masterful way with the new extension movement and its relations.

In 1896 Dr. True brought in the first report of the Committee on Methods of Teaching Agriculture, and thereafter served without interruption as chairman of that committee and its successors. The first report showed that, although the agricultural colleges had been in operation for thirty years, "there was no standard for instruction in agriculture," pointing to the great disparity in the subjects taught, their order and the time devoted to them, the relative amount of classroom and laboratory work, etc. It urged that, with due regard for local conditions, general progress in agricultural teaching could hardly be expected "until there is greater uniformity in planning and conducting the course of study in this subject." A noteworthy feature of this initial report was the attempt to classify the subject of agriculture, proposing the now familiar nomenclature for its leading divisions.

Dr. True's deep interest in teaching methods served to keep the work of this committee active through all the years, and to extend its studies to other departments of the land-grant colleges. It quite naturally led to his being selected as dean of the first graduate school of agriculture in 1902 and of the six succeeding sessions extending to 1916. He took great interest in the sessions of this school and attached to them large importance for the time. Nothing ever has taken their place, he believed, as a gathering place for workers and a forum for the development of standards and objectives. Perhaps this school was more of a turning point than generally has been realized.

Of his administrative career it may be recalled that this extended over thirty years, beginning with the directorship of the Office of Experiment Stations in 1893, and closing with the dissolution of the States Relations Service in 1923. This long period was marked by wise, conservative, and constructive service, which saw the States and the Federal Government united in the building of two great national systems.

His connection with research was not confined to the experiment stations. The development of investigation in home economics under his direction, beginning with an initial appropriation of \$10,000 and ultimately reaching \$70,000 per annum, went steadily forward for thirty years as a leading exponent in that field. It furnished the basis for the establishment of a separate bureau and the recognition of home economics research as an integral part of the experiment station program. Irrigation and drainage investigations likewise had large growth under his intelligent guidance, until they became part of another bureau.

At three stages of Dr. True's administration, his judgment and discretion and his ability to work effectively with others were called especially into play. Each of these marked more or less of a new epoch in the history of these institutions, for it inaugurated new relationships and far-reaching policies.

Up to the time he assumed directorship of the Office of Experiment Stations, it had functioned largely as a clearing house, with general advisory relations. It was soon to have these relations enlarged. The provision by Congress in 1894 for supervision over the use made of the funds under the Hatch Act opened the way for more active leadership. The step was not of his initiating but the language directing it was his, at the suggestion of the Secretary of Agriculture, and has proved effective. While the desirability of adequate accounting and supervision of the fund was recognized, the innovation aroused some little apprehension lest it might encroach on local initiative or bring about a semblance of centralized control.

The manner in which this new responsibility was exercised soon allayed uncertainty. It was not abrupt or revolutionary, but beyond certain basic interpretations it was progressive, to give time for adjustments and the development of confidence and assent.

Again when the Adams Act came in 1906, it provided a further extension of authority by definitely placing the administration of the act in the hands of the Department of Agriculture. The more fundamental and original types of research for which it was designed again required interpretation. Patient persuasion was the guiding motive at this stage. It was the beginning of the project system, which heretofore had been sparingly followed, and has since become an important administrative feature.

That these changes came about with relatively small friction was due very largely to Dr. True's attitude and personality, and to his recognition of the stations as fundamentally State institutions, with the emphatic indorsement of the principle of local control in meeting the varied needs of different agricultural regions. In less considerate hands the result might have been different. To his cultivation of close personal relations with station officers and first-hand knowledge of the conditions of their work, the stimulation of high ideals, his liberality, and his manifest purpose to be helpful may be attributed the early acceptance of a policy of State relationships which has resulted in the development of a real national system of research.

I believe the opinion of one of the foremost directors of that time will be accepted as the general verdict. He said: "It was his privilege and opportunity to contribute in a larger measure than has fallen to the lot of any other man to the initiative and formative guidance of this new work."

Another large undertaking of peculiar delicacy was the organization of the extension work of the Department of Agriculture and the States under the Smith-Lever Act, with the formation of the States Relations Service in 1915. It was the first cooperative enterprise entered into on a national scale by

the Federal Department and the land-grant colleges. Quite naturally many varied problems arose as to relationships, responsibilities, and policies pertaining to this far-flung enterprise. These are too fresh in mind to need mention at this time. It is sufficient to recall that under Dr. True's sympathetic leadership a strong cooperative extension organization was established in every State, and there were settled in a large way the principles and methods for the successful establishment of a national system of extension work in agriculture and home economics, with Federal, State, and county forces cooperating. The efficient functioning of this system during the war period, despite unusual difficulties, was a crowning evidence of its organized strength.

It will be seen, therefore, that Dr. True was intimately associated with the successive steps which have marked significant epochs in the development of the land-grant colleges. In all of these movements many leaders played their parts, and the outcome was the resultant of many factors; but to a singular degree it was his lot to exercise a guiding influence and to represent the Nation in working out its relations with the States along these lines.

Dr. Edwards, as president of this association in 1923, presented an appreciation of Dr. True at the time of his retirement from administrative duties which evidently met a warm response in the hearts of those who heard it. He declared that while time made it impossible even to summarize the magnitude and importance of his directive work, "suffice it to say that in wise, statesmanlike, constructive effort, working smoothly, without noisy declamation, and with quiet effectiveness, he has not been surpassed among us."

His last work was particularly for this association, and the interests it represents. The preparation of a history of agricultural education in this country, including research and extension, was undertaken at the request of its Executive Committee who gave him continued support. Despite his advanced age he applied himself to the task with characteristic diligence and zeal, and his death on April 23, 1929, found completed two of the three contemplated volumes and the third in such form as to insure its ultimate publication. Thus again he succeeded in a service which few would have attempted and for which perhaps none was qualified in like degree.

Of his personal qualities, if I may speak from a close association of many years, he was first of all a most kindly, lovable character, a man of innate nobleness. I never heard him speak ill of anyone--it was distasteful to him. I never saw him lose his temper or say a sharp word, although I have seen him under trying circumstances. And yet he was a judge of men, and he reached his own conclusions. He was a keen critic and wise counselor, but always a considerate one, for he was tolerant, sympathetic, and careful not to offend.

He was not aggressive in the usual sense, but he had no lack of initiative. The gentleness of his nature and his temperate manner sometimes misled those who failed to realize the force and perseverance back of his efforts. He was imaginative but balanced, courageous but patient, conciliatory but rarely lost sight of his ultimate purpose.

Modesty was a conspicuous quality. He sought no glory or credit for himself but was content to do his work without publicity if the things he sought came true. He cared not for power or authority except such as came through his influence on men's minds. His motive was results that would endure or mark a stage of advance.

A noteworthy thing about Dr. True was that he never became an old man in his thinking or his attitude. No one ever heard him disparage the new or suggest that it was an abandonment of aims and ideals. He accepted the changes which time brought with mind open and his face confidently toward the future.

The attributes of this man which made him so widely beloved and revered are well epitomized by his pastor in these lines:

"To think without confusion clearly,
To love one's fellow men sincerely,
To act from honest motives purely,
To trust in God and heaven securely."

